

out and about... middlesbrough



A STAR PERFORMER

Middlesbrough's Beechwood Easterside & District Social Club is the ultimate club. It makes a shed load of money, has a very strong committee, plenty of members and very little to worry about. MATTHEW MOGGRIDGE finds out why

Travelling North East to Darlington and then on to Middlesbrough, the weather began to improve. The persistent rain that had dogged *Club Mirror's* visit to Doncaster gradually cleared and by Wednesday morning - the day when cab driver Derrick Bird ran amok in Whitehaven, Cumbria - the sun was out and the skies were blue.

In fact, as the killing spree began, *Club Mirror*, oblivious to the horrors unfolding on England's West Coast, was making its way to the Beechwood Easterside & District Social Club to meet club secretary Mick Smith and president Nick Fairless.

The Beechwood is a big club, visible from a distance. It's a single-storey building surrounded by green fields and hemmed in by a huge car park - and on a good day, it's a nice place to be.

Unlike a lot of clubs, the Beechwood has very little in the way of problems: no brewery loans, no threat of imminent closure, no problem with the smoking ban and,

to be honest, not a care in the world about supermarkets and cut-price booze.

Alright, perhaps the club is a little concerned about the latter, but to give you some idea of how the Beechwood tends to take most things in its stride, when I asked how things were going in terms of preparation for the World Cup, the main concern of Mick and Nick was whether there was enough of a window to fit in the global football tournament.

Whereas for most clubs, the World Cup is a much-needed shot in the arm (as long as England stays the course), for the Beechwood, it's almost a bit annoying - in the same way that bank holidays can be irritating for busy people who just want to crack on.

It was a relief in many ways not to be walking into a club with a sympathetic ear for the smoking ban or the supermarket situation or to nod knowingly about brewery pricing or whether or not the club was going to close. The Beechwood, in other words, was a text book club; a living

embodiment of what a club should be and proof that if things are done properly, money can be made from running a club.

Who says that on-trade beer sales are declining? Not at the Beechwood. In five months, the club has taken £467,000 over the bar alone. On the day prior to *Club Mirror's* visit, the club made just over £2,000 and the takings for the year look like exceeding the £1 million marker and should come in at around £1.2 million - if not more.

Like all clubs, the Beechwood has had its fair share of ups and downs. It did once have brewery loans and there were times when the finances were not good because of them, but these were rectified, according to former boxer and bar steward, Brian Graham, who explained how once, in the distant past, the club took a bank loan to pay off its brewery loan and then renegotiated supply contracts with healthy discounts. The club hasn't looked back since and Graham said it was all about discounts.

The club was established in 1973 but the building was